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ABSTRACT

The design of this curriculum project allows teachers to introduce the rich Indian culture in a non-threatening way to learners who struggle with writing material. It was initially developed for special education students who read and write significantly below grade level. Some of the project's lessons include showing the students artwork and playing cassettes of talented Indian people who speak about various aspects in their diverse culture. The guided activities in the project are not only intended to motivate the students and to appeal to their learning styles, but also to serve a larger educational purpose to prepare special education students for their social studies classes. Following an introduction and general notes on audio tapes, the project is divided into part 1: "Guiding Questions/Activities"; and part 2: "The Audio Tapes." The tapes are: Tape 1: "Hinduism and Vishnu's Avatars"; Tape 2: "The Varaha Temple"; Tape 3: "Krishna"; Tape 4: "Kama/Consorts"; Tapes 5 and 6: "Nataraja, Lord of the Dance"; Tape 7: "The Pardhosham Festival in Madras"; Tape 8: "Sri Ekambaranathar Temple in Kanchipuram"; Tape 9: "Ganesha"; Tape 10: "Mahabalipuram Rock Carvings"; Tape 11: "Stone Carving of Ardhanareskvara"; Tape 12: "Philosophy of Giving/Lakshmi"; Tape 13: "Story of the Buddha"; Tape 14: "Gandhi/Indian Philosophy"; and Tape 15: "Jainism/Buddhism." Contains a 13-item teacher bibliography and a 7-item student bibliography. (BT)

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ED 434 851

**CURRICULUM PROJECTS DEVELOPED BY 1998 SEMINAR PARTICIPANTS**

# INDIA'S MYTHS AND SYMBOLS THROUGH THE ORAL TRADITION

Project for Fulbright to India

Summer 1998

Kathleen M. Fancher

**Submitted to**

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# INTRODUCTION

I have chosen to do my curriculum project on Indian philosophy, Hinduism and the oral tradition. My Fulbright experience will naturally add more depth into my regular education social studies classes study of ancient India. However, this curriculum project primarily demonstrates how I will share the information and materials, which I gathered in India with my special education language arts classes.

The special education students in my 6th grade 12:1:1 language arts classes read and write significantly below grade level. For some of the students just the idea of writing or reading brings extreme discomfort or resistance. The design of this curriculum project allows me to introduce the rich Indian culture in a very non-threatening way to learners who struggle with written material. Some of the lessons include showing the students incredible artwork and playing cassettes of talented Indian people who speak about various aspects in their diverse culture. These guided activities are not only intended to motivate the students and to appeal to their learning styles, but they will also serve a larger educational purpose.

Many times in the regular education setting, students with learning disabilities lack the basic information that their peers possess. This curriculum project will better prepare my special education students for their social studies unit on ancient India. I have these same students in my regular education social studies classes. Watching my special education students' share their knowledge of India with their regular education peers is also another objective of this project.

My language arts classes primarily focus on developing my students' reading and writing skills. Once the students gain an oral understanding of the Hindu characters, the pronunciations, the symbolism and basic plots of the Hindu myths, they will be presented with the printed stories. During my stay in India I purchased many children's books on the various myths, which include over thirty comic books. The series, the Amar Chitra Katha, contains good illustrations as well as easy to read captions. I am confident that this curriculum project will serve my students in many educational ways.

## GENERAL NOTES ON AUDIO TAPES

As I transcribed the vast collection of tapes (over 15 hours) from my stay in India, I faced many "artistic" decisions. Some I easily resolved while others were not. Originally, I wanted the transcriptions to reflect all of the speakers' intonations, inflections, and overall passion. Revealing the art of storytelling in a written form is extremely challenging. Some might say that only the original storytellers could genuinely accomplish it in a different medium.

During the transcribing process, I felt compelled to honor the easily recognizable changes in each speaker's voice by using different punctuation symbols. Capital letters show that words are stressed. One dash between a word indicates a slight pause while two consecutive dashes show a longer pause. Dashes between the letters of a word mean that the speaker said the word slowly. Three periods mean the speaker's ideas were not necessary to include. The words added in the parentheses attempt to help the text read more fluently. On the whole, any grammatical change or text correction was solely performed to help the text read more fluently. These were minimal changes because I wanted a genuine product, which would reflect the way the Indians told the stories

During the transcribing process, I realized even more that all my efforts would not truly relay the beauty and eloquence of the speakers' storytelling. A couple of times I became disappointed because the speakers sounded more like tour guides than storytellers or even Indians relaying stories. Despite the project's limitations, I believed it still offers incredible gifts to its readers. The wealth of information in the text is immense. These transcripts demonstrate the way natives explain many religious and philosophical ideas. Perhaps, most importantly, these tapes remind me of some of the best days that I spent in India.

## PART ONE- GUIDING QUESTIONS

How do we approach the study of different cultures?
How can we identify the Hindu Gods and Goddesses?
Why is the oral tradition an important aspect of Indian literature?
How can modern people challenge the myths of yesterday?

Below are samples of three activities that need to occur before the students hear Indian people speak about Hinduism. The first activity includes a simple story with a powerful message. The story speaks of replacing stereotypes and prejudices with understanding and respect. I want my students to understand that learning about the role religion plays in a different society must be approached in a respectful, non-judgmental way. After discussing the story and its meaning, the second activity, which includes examining visuals of the Hindu Gods and Goddesses, may provoke more curiosity than immaturity. The last activity demonstrates how modern wo/man questions the myths of yesterday.

FIRST ACTIVITY: This lovely story needs to be told. Ms. Rajni Nair shared this tale with all the Fulbrighters during our first afternoon in India. It's a good starting point because listeners are reminded not to pass judgment so quickly of different cultures. It also speaks about how one can take different paths to reach the same point, which can be symbolic of world religions. Unfortunately, I do not have an audio recording to share with the students, but Ms. Nair wrote it down for me.

A rich American tourist on a tour through India lands up in the southern fishing region of India. It is around 10:00 in the morning and he finds a fisherman fast asleep under a big tree with his head resting on a large basket which contains a huge fish. The American is surprised as well as concerned to see a person who is unemployed at ten in the morning. He stops by and wakes the man, wondering why he is not busy at work. The fisherman is both amused and curious about the foreigner but pleasantly responds that he has already made his catch for the day and is waiting for the local market to open, where he will sell his fish and take the money home to meet the day's needs.

The American is shocked. "You mean, you will catch only one big fish and sell that in the local market, and manage with the meager sum earned?" The Indian nods assent. The American decides to educate the rustic. So, settling down next to him, he delivers a long sermon on how he should go about his business in a more systematic manner. This includes catching more fish, going to the bigger town market and selling fish at a higher price, making more money to buy more fish and eventually ending up expanding his business to include several people working under him, and converting it into an industry. The fisherman listens and innocently queries: "After I have earned all these millions, then what?" The American answers, "Then you could put up your feet and relax to your heart's content." The Indian slides back into lying position, closes his eyes and happily mutters," But that's exactly what I am doing right now."
End of Story.

SECOND ACTIVITY:

Before the activity begins, a discussion of the word symbol is necessary. Students should understand what symbols are and what is meant by the phrase, "the symbolic meaning."

Next, the students will work in cooperative learning groups and examine the different Hindu gods and goddesses through various visuals. The visuals range from postcards, and comic books, to art books depicting the Hindu Gods and Goddesses. The visuals include the following Hindu Gods and Goddesses: Brahma, Saraswati, Vishnu (and the incarnations), Lakshmi, Shiva, Parvati, Durga, Kali, Ganesha, Agni, Hanuman, Indra, Kamadeva, Rati, Ganga, Kuber, Soma, Surya, Varuna, Vayu, and Yama. Other artwork showing the Buddha and of Mahavira (Jainism) can be displayed.

As the students are examining the visuals they will be expected to complete a simple chart with three columns: God/Goddess, Symbols, Symbolic Meanings. Students should be encouraged to think of what the various attributes of the Hindu god or goddess might mean. The names of the gods and goddesses will be covered and only identified by numbers. After each audio recording as the unit progresses, students will attempt to figure out which gods or goddesses were described. At the conclusion of the unit, students will be asked to complete this chart again only with the correct symbolic meanings.

THIRD ACTIVITY:

These activities focus on the importance of an oral tradition in a society and how contemporary societies question the meanings of classics.

I will show the students several different pieces of cloth and paper scrolls, which show different mythological scenes of Hindu gods or goddesses. A gentleman who lives in a small village near Calcutta paints these scenes or stories in vibrant colors on cloth or paper scrolls. This type of artwork, which is known as "Pata" is becoming more and more rare. Traditionally, the village storyteller not only paints the story, but he sings a song to accompany the artwork. I also have an audio tape of him singing two songs. His songs follow the story lines that are depicted on cloth or paper. Each song has a different refrain, which probably helps its listeners remember the story or song's message. (He did not speak English, but his soul message is beautifully portrayed.) Throughout this unit, students may be asked to illustrate the stories that they hear on the audio tapes.

India owes a lot of its rich tradition of storytelling to the tribal people who have always had a continuous oral tradition. But there is a strong oral tradition not only among the tribal people, but also of all people in India. A lot of great works of Indian literature most likely evolved over the generations. Some probably started as songs, oral stories/poems or plays and then were written not by a single person, but by many people.

India's most famous epics, The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were mostly likely constructed in this manner. According to an exhibit at the Nehru Discovery Center "The *Mahabharata* is a story of a man what he is and what he can be. In contrast to the *Ramayana* which is an ideal discourse on what man should be or should strive to be."

These great epics gave the old Indians who were in a very divided society with castes a common background. This summer, Professor Satchidanandan, a scholar of Indian literature, spoke about how over the centuries new meanings or interpretations have been added to these great epics as well as different plots or characters. Today in India these great works continue to unite people and provide soul material for the nation as well as its artists. For example, novelists will base a new novel around one of the epics in a totally new context.

I have tape recordings of the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavad-Gita* which are done professionally. (See bibliography) Huston Smith, author of *The Religions of Man* says, "Hearing the *Bhagavad-Gita*, rather than reading it, helps one understand why many cultures to this very day refuse to commit their sacred texts to writing, believing that script would profane them."

Below is the recording of Dr. P.J. Lavakare retelling the story of Ekalavya, which is from the *Mahabharata*. This is an excellent myth to show the way people of the past and modern people may view the meaning of the story differently.

...In the *Mahabharata* there is a famous hero (named) Arjuna -one of the five Pandavas. Now, as a prince he is to be taught different arts of fighting (to be used) in battle. So, in the kingdom, a man who is a scholar and also a good archer was appointed. His named was Drona. Drona started teaching these five Pandavas the art of archery. And he has decided that Arjuna is the best among the five. He also decided that his mission is that nobody will be better than Arjuna. Yes, that's Drona's mission.

Drona only teaches the princes. He doesn't teach any other human beings. So, Ekalavya is a boy who comes to him and says, "I would like to learn from you, Guru. Will you teach me?" Drona says, "No, I wouldn't teach you. You're not a prince."

But the boy, rather than being rejected and disappointed, goes back and makes a statue of the Guru. By using that as a focus of his attention, he learns the art of archery and inspiration. (That's why they call the school you visited earlier today)- Ekalavya. It means learn yourself or self work is emphasized. The point is Drona refuses to teach Ekalavya. He even forgets Ekalavya. Ekkalavya learns on his own and comes back.

There are different versions of this story. Whatever it is- there is an event which he (Ekalavya) excels or does something which Drona notices. He says, "Amazing, I don't know who?" The story goes the dogs are barking. One dog is barking. So, they are distracted. Suddenly the dog barking stops. How can that happen? They find the dog's mouth open and there are arrows stuck in his mouth-- without hurting him. Yet, the dog is unable to bark.

So, when Drona sees this amazing archery that someone has done he asks, "Who has done this?" So, the boy comes forward to see his Guru. He goes straight to him and says, "Guru, I am very happy." Drona says, "Why do you call me Guru?" "Well, I've learned this art--what you have seen from you." Drona, says, "I never taught you." Ekalavya says, "No, I did this statue."

So Drona is acting very funny now. He knows that this boy, Ekalavya, is going to be better than Arjuna as an archer. This is not proper because he is not his pupil. So he

uses a very scheming way of removing this competition. He says, "Well, if you claim me to be your Guru give me my fees." If your guru wants something, students give it to them. So he says, "Yes, Guru- whatever you ask for." He says, "Give me the thumb of your right hand. Cut off your right thumb and give it to me." So, the story goes that Ekalavya cuts it off and gives it to him. The real reason the Guru asked him to do that was there after he would never be able to be an archer. Then Arjuna could continue to be the supreme archer. Well, the message here has to do with respecting the guru.--Faith and loyalty to the teacher. Nowadays, though, should students have so much respect for the teacher that they are willing to give anything?

Activities: Throughout this study students will learn how modern Indian people question their mythological stories. I want them to understand that Indians do not question so much the physical existence of a character as much as they do the ideas or concepts in the mythology.

Other possibilities the temple near Ayodhya – The Babri Masjid which is supposed to be Rama's birthplace. On December 6, 1992 Hindus stormed a 16$^{th}$-century mosque. (This mosque supposedly was constructed on the site, which was Rama's birthplace.) This is still a hot issue in India because of what that site symbolizes to both religious groups. If age appropriate, Rama's treatment of Sita at the end of the *Ramayana.*

## PART TWO- THE TAPES

### **Tape 1**- HINDUISM AND VISHNU'S AVATARS
Told by the Khajuraho Guide*

In Hindu mythology, as I told you, the supreme power of super consciousness represents the all mighty god, Brahma who is without any expression --without any shape. But how (do) we notice the function of nature- the cycle of nature? We always notice it by the three uses of energy - creation, preservation and transformation....

So, that's how the whole cycle of nature was recognized with the three divine forces. To understand God---G to generate, O to organize and D to destroy. So, the creation, preservation and transformation are always recognized by the three gods of Hindu mythology- Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Brahma stands for creation. Vishnu stands for preservation and Shiva stands for the transformation and the destruction of evils and ignorance.

Being a preserver, Vishnu is responsible to protect and preserve the life of the nature. And whenever the life was threatened in the nature and whenever the creation was stuck in the nature-- Vishnu came in different forms of incarnations. So, in the mythology there's a concept of nine incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Surely, there is a concept of ten, but up to now only the nine incarnations are noticed. For the tenth we are still waiting and that will come after a few thousand years. So, the system of incarnations in Hindu mythology is very interesting. --Because it is similar or like the evolution theory.

The very first incarnation of Vishnu was noticed in the water as a form of fish. Second, was the turtle. Third was the wild boar. Fourth was the half-man and half-lion. Fifth was the dwarf, a tiny monkey kind of person. Then came the first -fully grown man as a great warrior. RAMA-- the most ideal king ever born on this earth. He was the hero of the holy epic -*Ramayana*. Eighth was Krishna. He was known for his great knowledge in the *Bhagavad Gita*. So, Krishna was considered the eighth incarnation of Vishnu. The ninth one is considered to be the Buddha. So, there are nine incarnations of Vishnu. For the tenth we are still waiting and that's Kalkin-after a couple thousand years.

*Unfortunately, I do not know the name of the guide.

**Tape 2**- THE VARAHA TEMPLE*
Told by the Khajuraho Guide

In the Western group of temples—(There is) this small temple of Varaha (as the) wild boar carved in sandstone. But it gives you a sense that it's carved in metal. It's not in a metal. It's in sandstone. This is about a 1,000 years old. People have been touching this stone for ages. Whoever comes here likes to feel this boar. They leave their oily handprint on this stone and that's why it gives you a shiny look. This complete sculpture of the wild boar is carved in one piece of stone----monolithic. After carving the whole rock –STILL this stone is more than 6 tons. There are 674 carvings around the body of the boar, which makes this sculpture very meaningful. This is the symbol of the third incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

Why was this sculpture carved here in the form of a boar? -- Because for each incarnation there is a mythological story. For the third incarnation of (the) boar, wild boar - there is a very interesting story in the *Vishnu Purana*. It says in the *Vishnu Purana* that the mother earth-- the globe--the mother earth- was stolen by a demon. The mother earth was hidden very deeply in the ocean –very deep inside the ocean under the water – deep within the mud. So, by stealing the mother earth goddess AND hiding her deep within the ocean, in the mud ---that's how the demon had challenged the god. He was thinking God is so pure that he will never come in a dirty place to rescue her. So, that's how through his ignorance- he had challenged the god.

Vishnu came into the boar form. Vishnu chose the boar form purposely because a wild boar is the only animal that can easily move in the mud -- easily fight in the mud- easily smell and find things hidden in the mud. So, that's how and why Vishnu came in the boar form to go very deep inside the mud and rescue the mother earth. That's how the mother earth was brought (back). She was rescued by Vishnu.--She was saved- by Vishnu from the hand of the demon. So, that's how the creation was once again preserved.

So, whenever the creation in the life is threatened it says that God always comes in a different form. So, when Vishnu came into (the) boar form --it was recognized by the WHOLE universe. So, all the gods in the heavens--all the human beings on the earth-- and all the living beings in this nature- and all creatures recognized Vishnu in this great form who was carrying the mother earth, Prithivi – and bringing back life to them. So, all (of them) started praying and they started feeling. The whole universe manifested around this body. So, 674 carvings around this body of this boar are representing the whole universe celebrating this rescue. The upper friezes show heaven, the middle friezes show earth and the lower friezes show the Asuras, the demons in the underworld. The serpent is a symbol of time and eternity. The mother earth was resting on the hood of the cobra.

*Show slides of The Varaha Temple in the Western group of temples in Khajuraho as well as illustrations of Varaha. Professional slides from the Centre for Cultural Resources & Training in New Delhi as well as my photographs and slides will be utilized during these audio recordings.

**Tape 3**- KRISHNA
Told by Shobita Punja

Vishnu has something like 10 incarnations. We say nine, but you can say ten. You can add Buddha or Jesus Christ. Whenever the earth is in trouble, Vishnu will come for its preservation. Vishnu will come and save it. In the first form he is a fish. He saves the earth from the waters. Then he comes as amphibian from the water onto the land. Then he comes as huge, cosmic boar – like a pig. The story is very much like the flood story. The whole earth is submerged with water. The earth appeals to Vishnu. Vishnu comes as the boar and just picks up earth from the waters and saves her and all the species. So, Vishnu comes whenever there is a problem.

The most darling of all Vishnu's incarnations is of course, Krishna. Everybody loves Krishna -as the child god. His story is very much like Christ's story. There was a king who was told that a child would be born in the kingdom who will kill you. So, he (the king) had all the males born that year killed. The king put Krishna's mother into jail the night he was born. The child was mysteriously sneaked away from the jail and another child was brought in. The child was taken to a home of a cowherd in Mathura, which is 90 kilometers from Delhi where he was born.

He grew up there as a cowherd. Every Hindu family will refer to their children as Krishna. Look at Krishna! He has dropped his milk. Look at Krishna! He has butter all over his mouth. It's Krishna- the baby. So, 90% of the country will worship Krishna as the baby because a baby is something you can emphasize with. Then you have Krishna - the cowherd which 99% of India is the cowherd. Most Indians have cows or depend on cows.

The concept of the cow is actually very beautiful. We say, "Holy cow!" But, we just joke about it. The concept is so beautiful. It says in the texts that the cow is the only animal that gives to others what it gives to its own children. If you can give to other people what you give to your own child that's true giving- that's real giving. It's not this is for my baby – and how sweet your baby is. It has to be the same. Just like the cow gives milk to its own and to others. And, you have to give it voluntarily. (Laughs) The use (of cows) and how dependent my country is on the cow is why Krishna as the cowherd (has) very important symbolism.

Krishna the lover…grows up in country….He is often shown with Radha. Krishna is described as being blue-- as the blue god. He's not blue. He's described in the poetry as the same color as a rain cloud – full of rain. You know that blue-black color. You know that color when a cloud is very full of rain. That's his color because he is like that rain cloud. He can bring freshness, vitality- back to your life.

(One) story is that Krishna is in the village. He comes down and sees this group of young ladies going to the river and getting ready to take a bath in the river. They take off their clothes and leave their pots, which they have to collect water. They get into the water to bathe. Krishna sees the clothes and thinks this is a good chance. He picks up their clothes and goes up the tree. (This) is something that must be happening in India everyday – all the time—naughty boys. Then he calls down to the ladies and say, "So,

ladies, what are you going to do now?" The poor girls start screaming and shouting. They say, "Krishna, please don't bully us. Give us back our clothes." Krishna says, "No, I won't. I can't give you back your clothes until you do one thing." So they say, "What?" Krishna says, "Come out of the water. You can't hide yourself. You have to put your hands above your head and say that you worship me." So, here we have these poor, reluctant village girls coming out of the river. Then the verse ends with a lovely piece that says, "Then they were all naked in front of God."

That is very typical of Indian poetry, Indian literature and of Indian thought. A scene that is so common that happens so often in everyday life that you take its humor, its eroticism. You can take its sensuousness about you and (then) you give a philosophical twist to it. You can see its meaning. I mean that boys will always be naughty and girls will always be what they are.

Suggested Activities:

India is infamous for its cows that wander the villages and cities looking for food. Ask students to brainstorm what dangers urban cows encounter because of modern inventions. For example, not only are cars a problem, but so are the new types of garbage which is strewn is the city streets. New Delhi now has cow catchers!

**Tape 4**- KAMA/CONSORTS
From The Khajuraho Guide:

Look at this very beautiful expression of Cupid, but you will be surprised to see- this Cupid is not like the western mythological Greek handsome young boy. This Cupid here is accompanied. In Hindu mythology or religion, no symbol of God or expression of god is accepted as complete without his consort. God is accepted as the collective form of energy. Cosmic consciousness is passive. Eternal cosmic energy is active. That is the energy that awakes the consciousness or arouses the consciousness. This energy uses the consciousness for creativity. It's the consciousness who makes energy fruitful. Without consciousness, energy is destructive. With infusion of consciousness and energy there is perfection. In that perfection there is an expression of bliss. That expression of absolute bliss and peace is an expression of God. So all the gods have consorts-- like Shiva with Parvati, Vishnu with Laksmi, Brahma with Saraswati, Agni with Svaha. Kama is with his consort, Rati. Kama means love and Rati is passion.

But how can you recognize Kama? You have to see the iconographical details – You have to see their attributes. What symbols are they carrying? What is Kama holding? He is holding the five arrows of flowers. They are arrows of flowers. Purposely the arrows are made out of flowers--arrows of flowers with five human heads. There are five: not four or six. Why are they floral, five and with human heads? It is very meaningful. The five arrows of flowers in the hands of Kama.--They are symbolizing the five senses of human beings which are highly awakened in romantic union. It says in the mythology when Kama shoots his arrows they hit the five senses and that's how human beings feel sensations when they fall in love.

But poor Kama can not use his arrows. He can not shoot his arrows. Do you know why? He doesn't have a bow. So, where is the bow? It is in her hand. (Rati) She's carrying the bow. So, she is his completion. He feels more complete and perfect and creative only with her. Without her he is nothing. She is his completion not he. So, she is carrying the bow, which is made out of sugar cane. She is the goddess of love--and sugar cane brings out the sweetness of love. The arrows of flowers in the hand of Kama show the fragrance of love.

Related Activities:
Students should be able to identify the illustrations of Kama and his consort. The idea of a consort needs to be explained in simpler language.

**TAPE 5** – NATARAJA, LORD OF THE DANCE
Told by Sunithi L. Narayan

Shiva is in the dancing pose- the cosmic dancer- Besides (this) being a beautiful dance pose, every position of the hands and the feet have a specific meaning. The right palm, which is out and up indicates protection. Have no fear. (Sanskrit meaning) The right hind hand holds a kind of a kettle drum which when struck produces a sound similar to the primordial sound OOOMMMMM and that sound is a symbol of creation. When the syllable is pronounced this inaudible sound --which starts from the navel goes through the vocal chords to come out as the audible sound OMMMMM. That means creation.

The left hind hand holds fire. Fire is not only a symbol of destruction, but anything that comes into the fire is consumed by the fire and purified by the fire. So, that stands for destruction and purification to be reconstructed again. So-- in creation is destruction. In destruction there is creation. Nothing is created for permanence. Nothing is destroyed for permanence. In the day to day language-- we say the morning dies for the afternoon to be born--afternoon dies for the evening to be born--evening dies for the night to be born--night dies for the morning to be born again. So, what is it that dies or is born? It's just the cosmic circle that goes on and on and on and on and on.

When Shiva is in his dancing pose with one leg lifted up--he stands on the back of a diminutive figure (that) has a baby form and an adult head – an adult face. This form is called _____. (It's the) demon of ignorance, illusion and egoism in every individual self. Firmly planted down by that leg, which stands firm on the figure. When these three qualities are lost, what happens to the spirit--- the individual soul which is always free. It is uplifted, elevated. That is indicated by the left leg. The left forehand points to this lifted foot- liberation. Indicating liberation is possible, but only when ignorance, illusion and egotism are gone forever. So, that is the symbolic message of the dancing form of Shiva, as the great cosmic dancer. It's a lovely artistic conception of subtle truths, which show so magnificently in the dance form of Shiva.

**TAPE 6** – NATARAJA, LORD OF THE DANCE
Told by Shobita Punja

Shiva carries a little drum. Ok, in the beginning there was nothing. Then there was a vibration. Then that vibration became a rhythm and from that rhythm all the rhythms of the universe started. Ok- there's the rhythm of the universe. There's the rhythm of your heart. There's a...there's a pulse in everything. That's the sound as the sound of creation- the first rhythm.

In the other hand, we have him carrying a little flame, which is destruction. Everything will be consumed by that fire. So, that's the cycle of life and death. It's continuous, ever lasting cycle. In one hand he has a ------. We use it in dance also. I am sure the Pope does it as well. This is benediction. This is a reassurance- a protection- a blessing. Yes, he is saying, "I will bless you." From this hand he points to his foot which is up and free. His other foot is standing on this poor little creature. This dwarf who has got ignorance. I will release you from this cycle of life and trample on ignorance and free you from the chains of the earth.

Ok, this is the cycle of life and death. The whole point of life is not dying because you know that's not the end of it. The end is only when you attain that wisdom. That freedom from that ignorance. (A) symbol of wisdom (is the) sun-any form of light.

In his hair- Do you see his hair going up? In his hair there is a little lady who looks more like a mommy. She has her hands together like this. Can you see that? She the river Ganga. She's the river Ganges. She's considered one of the most beautiful goddess in the Hindu pantheon.

The story goes like this. She's the Milky Way in the sky – this beautiful Milky Way. The earth is suffering---so much sin and disaster here. The gods ask her to come down. And, she's a very haughty goddess. She says, "I am sorry if I come down to earth. The earth will just be flooded over and consumed by my waters. I can't. You know, I am too big for you." So, they say, "What shall we do?"

There's a sage who was doing this mediation. He said, "Oh, what I need to do is to get Shiva to come and sit. Then I'll ask her to fall from heaven. Maybe he can carry her weight, but we need the water." So, we need the water. She agrees and sort of tells Shiva, "Be careful. I am, you know, very powerful." So, Shiva opens up his hair. He has these long strands of hair. She comes pouring down from heaven. The poem goes that she gets lost in his locks. This tiny little trickle comes down and that's this mighty river, the Ganges.

Now, the story is very beautiful. It's a very sweet story, but the fact that it is still being used today in our rituals. You go to the Ganges to put your dead into the Ganges. That river will then go back to Shiva. So, to go to Banaras and put your ashes there--- to say that all the rivers will finally go to that one ocean. That (is the) ocean from which we all came. That's the meaning of it. She's also this beautiful goddess so she sits in his hair like a symbol. Shiva's wife Parvati is furious all the time. You have this terrible jealousy all the time. As if to say --why is this--why is this gorgeous woman standing next to you all the time? You have lots of playful ideas with Ganga.

Burning the dead is another beautiful concept. Shiva wears ash on his forehead. All Shivites will do this too. Now, the idea is if you are burned and I am burned--- after we are dead – and a dog is burned -and a king is burned- you would not be able to distinguish (the ashes). So, are you to Shiva. You are the same. The body is burned into ashes. The ashes are put into the river and take you to that one ocean.

Shiva is a real terror. He wears snakes around his neck. He's a drug addict. He walks around with all the lame, the distorted, the deformed- everything that is not perfect is also Shiva. Shiva means auspicious- divinity. It isn't the name of a man. It's a word in Sanskrit, which means auspicious. So, his wife- a lot of people make fun of his wife. They say, "Why are you in love with this man who walks around with snakes?" But she says, "That's also divinity. That's all part of his teachings." Why do you like this man who walks around naked? He doesn't wear any jewelry. He's not beautiful. He's not handsome. She says, "But he's the original part of this universe." She just keeps replying.

Related Activities:
Students can learn more about the holy city of Varanasi, which some believe is where Shiva resides.

**TAPE 7** – THE PARDHOSHAM FESTIVAL IN MADRAS*
Told by Sunithi L. Narayan.

*"A good teacher is worth a million books."*

It actually means just that part of the day when the light says good-bye to the day and night creeps in. Pardhosham can have two periods. Dawn and dust --and these two parts of the day are the best ones-to examine one self--self-examination—self-realization. The temples are dedicated to Shiva. Twice a month on thirteenth day after the new moon and thirteenth day after the full moon, this great festival takes place. Of course, the rituals are there --that is different. But what is important-- is to make the immature man understand and experience within himself the meeting point of the I and the thou. (?) Symbolized by the meeting point of the day and the night. This is the symbolic significance.

And of course-- there must be a story otherwise it can't appeal to the immature man. You see every adult has a little child hiding in him or in her and that little child tries to come out and be a child. And so, --all of us like to listen to stories because we become children again. We want the innocence again. The quintessence of innocence and that's what you find in a child. So, these stories try to bring out the innocence of the real self, the inner self who has not forgotten. That's the main aim of it.

So, the story goes-- that Shiva who is the great cosmic dancer. It is the rhythm of his dance --which keeps the galaxy – the planets- everything in motion. And there is no confusion at all. Everything goes at its pace. But why? -- Because there is the wisdom in the dance of Shiva. This rhythm is echoed in every individual --by the heartbeat - which is a beautiful rhythm. If something goes wrong with that heartbeat - one is in trouble. And so this rhythmic dance which keeps the entire cosmos in full motion is suppose to have taken place at this hour, this part of the day when the light and darkness come together. The duality is in everything which ultimately becomes one.

And in this temple it is very well demonstrated. Shiva's mount is the Nandi bull. The Nandi bull stands for dharma. The literal translation of dharma in English is not available. It means many things- righteousness, good deeds, good thoughts. Anyway Nandi stands for dharma- and Shiva the cosmic lord --dances in between the horns of the Nandi bull. To see this rhythmic dance is marvelous! ALL the celestials --ALL the galaxies in the various universes --ALL assemble in the heavens to see this dance. Just imagine what a fantastic spectacle it must be! And in the temple here- Shiva and his consort, Parvati- they are all decked with jewels, flowers, and good clothes. They are placed on a silver mount –Nandi.

(She describes the processions in the festival) Now, the entire structure is assembled on a platform and the entire small platform has two huge big wooden poles- trunks of trees, which are tied to these pedestals and the devotees gleam at each other and carry the Lord. And, the pipe music it is called _____. It looks like a clarinet without the keys. It's a wind instrument and along with that is _____. Music plays---leading

this procession. Then the devotees who carry the beautiful bronze deities of Shiva and Parvati sway a little bit to the music-keeping the rhythm.

And behind them come a group of very learned** scholars who recite one of the Vedas—*Sama Veda*. And behind them are another set of learned Brahmin scholars - who recite the *Rig Veda* and behind them is another set of learned Brahmin scholars- who recite *Yajur Veda*. After the three Vedas, come the singing minstrels. These minstrels sing the various hymns that have been composed by the great saints of Shiva. They pour out their hearts--these saints. The temple scholars repeat this music. And behind the temple scholars come little children from the village schools that are by the temple singing the chants. The procession starts from the flag mast where we were earlier today and goes clockwise three times.

This is one of the most beautiful festivals that one can witness in a temple. It comes once--twice a month. This temple is in a very old suburb of the city--the southern part of the city. It's a very, very old suburb whose history is lost to time. The name of the suburb is called Mylapore and it's a very, very, holy place with an old temple with tradition.

And if there is a temple of tradition then there has to be an old, old story. Why is it so? These old stories are called Puranas. Puranas are an integral part of the life of a Hindu. Puranas means that which is very – very old. Nobody knows how old it is but it has come down through the word of mouth. -- Beautiful stories which tell the glory of the divine --performing miracles for his devotees. And one can not ask why because God's will has no way. You just have to accept it. And it's not that the Divine has to manifest or has to act in the drama. He doesn't need it. He or she or it doesn't need it.
But why? These are lessons for the humans just as a teacher has to be an example to the students. The teacher must behave in such a way that the student takes it up as a role model...

And one of the beautiful stories is about Shiva and Parvati- the divine couple. And, in Hindu philosophy every profession is deified---an engineer, a doctor, a surgeon, a lawyer, a teacher...Who is a teacher? Who is the teacher of teachers? The Divine -- himself. But how (can you) show the importance of the teacher? How should the teacher behave? And how should the student behave towards the teacher? So, the divine couple decided to enact —a divine play. And, in this divine play --Shiva becomes the teacher and his divine consort, Parvati becomes the student.

How should a teacher be? Dedicated. Never hold back all information. Give all that you know. And learn from this devotion. So, Shiva in the role of a teacher was explaining to his divine consort the significance and meaning of primordial word OM (?). Parvati, his student- his consort- was v-e-r-y attentive, v-e-r-y receptive student—She had all the qualities that is expected of a dedicated student.

But unfortunately, a beautiful peacock spread out its tail and started dancing in front of the divine couple. The student was distracted. N-o-o- What a g-r-a-v-e sin! She was not listening to what Shiva was saying. It went in one ear and went out the other. Shiva sensed the distraction. He was sad. He was annoyed. He was frustrated. He was angry and in a fit of anger he cursed her to become a peacock.

In Hindu philosophy nobody is damned for life. If you repent- if it comes from the bottom of your heart – sincere. There's always a pardon. Parvati realized her folly and sought the pardon from her lord. Shiva was only too happy to pardon her. But God's word is truth. He could not reverse the curse. He could modify the curse. So, he told her go down to earth take the form of a peacock, that which distracted you – that form. Pray to me. I will absorb you into myself.

So, the divine mother came down to earth to this particular place which is filled with magnolia trees. It was a magnolia forest and it had the perfect vibrations. She took the form of a peacock and made a penance to her lord and became one with him. So, this is a lesson for the teacher and a lesson for the student. The teacher should be patient-not get angry. The student should be attentive and not anger the teacher. Isn't it beautiful?

Around the temples (look at the) statues—(each) has a story element pertaining to the divine play. This has been happening for hundreds of years-- which means the whole place is charged. Science believes that there are certain places on the face of earth that have certain energy. That draws people and energy that only be experienced- not seen. And that is what you find here at least for those few moments when there's a vision of the Lord in a material way. The thoughts are focused on the deity. For those very moments the mind which is riddled with worries and cares is free. The spirit is free--as it has to be.

...Shiva manifests as one of the five elements- earth. We worship the divine not only with many forms but also as the five elements that make up the universe. Earth, wind, fire, water and atmosphere are the elements. These five elements are called the five ascending steps to realize the absolute --who is formless through a form. The first element is the earth -which one can see, feel and touch and make a figure of. The second element is water. One can see, feel and touch, but not make a figure. The third element is fire which one can only see and feel, but not touch. The fourth element is wind which only can be felt-not seen. The last element- the last step is atmosphere. One can not see, can not touch, can not feel, but you can't deny that there is no atmosphere. So, is the divine with a form without a form. As Shiva manifests as earth, it's a great place of pilgrimage.

* Besides seeing photographs, I have an audio recording of the music and chanting during the festival.

** "Learned" is a word that I heard several times during my stay in India.

**TAPE 8**- Sri Ekambaranathar Temple in Kanchipuram
Told by Sunithi L. Narayan

This temple has a beautiful story. Shiva and Parvati were together. And Parvati in a very playful, romantic mode closed the eyes of her lord. The eyes' of Shiva – the right eye is the sun and the left eye is the moon. When she closed both of the eyes, there was total darkness in the entire cosmos. And, there was confusion- Pandemonium. Shiva sensing the danger --out of his infinite compassion for all the creation- - opened his third eye, the fire knowledge, and allowed the cosmos to continue.

Parvati realized the g-r-a-v-e mistake she made unwittingly, but all the same, it was a mistake. So, she decided to come down to earth and make a penance to him—to purify herself and become one with him. So, the divine mother came down to this earth. She chooses this hallow spot which was full of mango trees. Standing on a bed of fire with one leg lifted up, she made a linga out of earth, the first element. She made a penance and become one with him.

When she's passive she's Parvati. When she's Parvati she can never, never fight. She is full of compassion. She grants boons. But when she has to fight the demons she becomes active. She's very beautifully proportioned but with multiple arms- each hand wielding a weapon then she is called Durga. She doesn't look terrible at all, and sometimes these demons are not afraid of that benign face. (Even though) she's full of energy and activity and (has) multiple arms (with) weapons, they don't care for her. Then she has to look TERRIBLE. She becomes Kali with disheveled hair - big eyes- arched eyebrows. Sometimes the tongue comes out to instill fear into them. Kali only looks monstrous to the demons. To the deities she's very beautiful.

**Tape 9**- Ganesha
Told by Shobita Punja

The little elephant god (is) loved by everyone in the universe. He is the son of Shiva- actually Parvati, his mother, the goddess. The story goes like this Parvati wanted a baby – wanted a son. So, she created him from his side or something unusual. She produces this little boy. Then the story goes and this is one of many stories. She goes to have a bath in the river. She tells her son, "Please don't allow anyone to come because I am bathing."

So, Ganesha stands over there and Shiva walks in and says, "Where is my wife?" Ganesha stands there and says, "I'm sorry. You can't come in. She's having a bath." Shiva says, "Who the hell are you?" Ganesha says, "I am her son. Shiva says, "Well, I never met you before." They have a little bit of a quarrel and Ganesha insists that Shiva doesn't go in. Shiva gets so angry that he knocks off Ganesha's head.

The poor boy is dead. Then Shiva storms into the bath where the lady is bathing in the river. She says, "Where is my son?" He says, " Is that your son? I just cut off his head." She is furious. The Goddess has a terrible temper -as you can imagine. She says, "I want my son back." So, he gets so upset with his lady that he sends for one of his attendants. He says to him, "Just find this boy a head." Nearby there is a herd of elephants wading in the river so the elephant's head is put on Ganesha's head. So, there we have Ganesha with an elephant head.

The symbolism of Ganesha is quite beautiful. He's the god of all beginnings. He's the god of transitions. He is the god of intelligence and wisdom. He's the god who can put obstacles in your way. He's also the god who removes obstacles. So, the first thing you do anytime for everything is pray to Ganesha. You move into a new house- you pray to Ganesha. You go on a new journey you pray to Ganesha. You open a new exercise book you write Ganesha's name. You step outside your house- you pray to Ganesha. Please remove all obstacles. Please remove all obstacles and make my journey safe. Ganesha is the one you pray to all the time.

He is most adorable because of his little elephant head and fat little stomach. Now, he rides on a little rat – a rat- a mouse – a fellow like that. We have lovely stories of the moon making fun of him. -- This fat little fellow riding on a mouse. Now, the idea that the god of obstacles – the lord of obstacles- the remover of obstacles has an elephant head is very interesting. An elephant in the jungle can remove all large obstacles either with his head or with his trunk. He sits on a rat because a rat can find its way through anything. Ok- There's a purpose in this poetic creation of the symbolism of the elephant headed god. He loves sweets. He's always eating something. You see his trunk is on a little sweet. He has a broken tusk.

Can you see that one of his tusks is broken? The story I tell my 6-year-old is that he was going on his mouse- back from a dinner party and he had eaten too much. The moon started laughing and saying, "Look how fat you are." Ganesha gets so angry that he breaks his tusk and throws it at the moon. The other story is that he broke it to write the *Mahabharata*. So, that's another problem, you have a thousand different stories for every event in Ganesha's life. But he's an adorable god and much loved because he's the

wise one. He's the head of Shiva's army. That's why he's called Ganesha. He's got many, many names, which also explain his different qualities.

Suggested Activities:
Discuss some of the obstacles that face the country of India such as illiteracy, pollution, or the population.

**Tape 10**- MAHABALIPURAM-ROCK CARVINGS
Told by Sunithi L. Narayan

(There are) four categories: the bar relief - where on the wall of the rock the artist has sculpted figures to tell a story with a beginning-- what you might call a fresco on stone or a picture book of Hindu mythology. These are all stories on stones. The second variety is the cave variety where the artist has dug into the rock to make a chamber and decorated the panels of the chamber with stories. The third variety is the monolithic variety where the artist has worked on one rock working from the pinnacle to the base without using brick, wood or mortar. The last variety is the reverse of the monolithic structural - built with granite from the base stone on stone to the pinnacle. So, these are the four varieties that we are going to see. All of them are from the seventh century. Isn't it unique just to think in the seventh century an open-ended studio with hundreds of sculptors working on granite? Even now you can hear the music of chisels. That's because there is a college of sculpture and architecture nearby.

This is a small bar relief (Krishna Mandapam) compared to the big one we are going to see. And the story is a popular one -that of Krishna. You know, Krishna is one aspect of the divine. WE worship him as baby now----as a small toddler-- a young boy-- a teenager-- a youth-- the beloved, the friend- the philosopher- the guide- e-v-e-r-y-thing.

And the story goes once when there was torrential rains and floods ----caused by the rains due to the JEALOUSLY of Indra --All the shepherds- cowherds with their families and cattle went to Krishna for help. They were unlettered cow herders and unlettered shepherds. But one thing they had that the others did not have was THE FAITH in him. It's not the belief IT'S THE FAITH. Belief has a tinge of doubt, but not faith.

So, when they went to Krishna and sought his help--there he was ready to help them. He lifted a B-I-G mountain and held it up like a parasol. And under the shelter of the rock, the people carried on their daily routine as if nothing had happened. This is like a beautiful parable to tell us nothing is impossible for the divine. If only we know to put our trust and UN-QUESTIONING faith in the divine. For God is the good shepherd. We are his flock. He knows how to tend to his flock and go out and go after the lost ones. And there you find Krishna holding up the rock. See the pressure exerted. Look at the pull of the muscles. It's granite. It's so difficult to work with, but look at the pull of the muscles. Look at the dimple here. And the palm-out and down --indicates unlimited grace.

There are two ways of giving. You give like this (she pinches her fingers) but then you have only a certain quantity that you have you can give---and once you've given your hand is empty. There is nothing you can offer. But when you offer with an open palm the person in need must come forward to take. And God's grace is always without a limit. And that's why in portraits of gods and goddesses one palm is out and up----- indicating do-not-be-afraid. And the other palm out and down (indicates) unlimited grace. Every gesture has a meaning These are called mudras- the language of hands.

And there you find Krishna with absolute ease. There is no strain on this person. As if lifting this mountain was child's play. Look at the way he stands so relaxed. The

people-- most of them did not wonder because to them he was the Divine. He could do anything, but there were others who did wonder also. The contrast is beautifully shown. There is an old man leaning on a staff with a child on his shoulder. It could be a street scene today-- a milkmaid with lots of milk holding onto a child and two women looking at Krishna with wonder.

Whenever there is something unbelievable that's happened we tend to say, "Is that so?" Look at the (figures with those) eyebrows raised and fingers clenched. Look at the big eyes. Look at the slit fingers. It's called wonder (Sanskrit word). You can't explain how, but it has happened. And then you follow the figures, you find an old woodcutter. He rests on an axe. This gives us an idea of the types of tools they were using. He also wears a robe. India has always been famous for its textiles. And look at the dress worn by this lady. ...There must have been trade with many parts of the world. And merchants must have come with stories of what they had seen in other countries. And the artist sculptures have listened to them and tried to sculpt what the tradesmen have told them.

Here are your elephants (Arjuna's Penance). This bar relief is considered to be the biggest bar relief in the whole world. And it has nothing less than 150 figures of superhuman, human and subhuman. And all of them are woven together to tell a story from the great epic--*Mahabharata*. The story concerns one of the heroes of the epic- Arjuna- the valiant one.

Arjuna, along with his brothers, was driven out of his kingdom by his cousins - who had usurped his kingdom. And so all of the brothers went away to live in the forest in exile. While in exile Arjuna decided to make a penance to Shiva. The purpose of the penance was to get from Shiva a celestial war weapon _____ --maybe something like a guided missile or a boomerang which could be retrieved. And then Shiva comes through the forest in the guise of a hunter. Not only to test Arjuna for the sincerity of the penance, but also to rid him of the egotism that he had. Only then would he deserve the weapon. He has to deserve his desire. And so when the purpose was accomplished, he (Shiva) comes to the forest.

...The purpose is accomplished. Arjuna realizes his folly. He falls to feet of Shiva—says, "Pardon." He's forgiven. And he's given this dangerous weapon. But Shiva warns him. He says, "I'm obliged to give you this weapon because of the penance you did to me with mindfulness. But, --don't ever use this weapon." There are many lessons we have to draw from this story. And that story has been sculptured here. Although many books on this art would speak of it as another story as the descent of the Ganga according to my mentor it is the penance of Arjuna so I go by him.

There is a natural cleft in the rock. And the artist has made use of this natural cleft to show the river Ganges coming down. In the cleft, you find the figures of snake gods and goddesses. The home of these celestial snake gods is the Ganges River and hence they find a place here. Close to the cleft, can you see a figure --rather wasted with one leg lifted and hands lifted above? He looks like an old man, but he's not. He's the hero, Arjuna. He's not old, but he's been fasting. After this long period of penance, he has wasted away. See the matted hair, the toe nails, the tendons sticking out. It shows

how serious the penance has been. Then Shiva comes through the forest with all the wild animals. Shiva is the hunter...

All the celestials want to have a vision of Shiva. So all of them are rushing from the heavens. Look at them coming towards the cleft--including the sun and the moon. Right on top can you see a figure with a halo? The one to our left is the sun and the one to our right is the moon. The celestials are heavenly. They have the power to fly. They don't need wings- -- but how to show them in flight? The legs are swept back to indicate they can fly through space without any visible support. And the artist wanted to add in a few more details to drive home the fact that it was the Ganges riverbank. For which the day to day happenings by the river are taken into account.

You have been to Varanasi... Going along the river in the boat- did you see the people standing in the water looking up to the sun and worshipping the sun? (She draws the parallel between what happened in ancient times along the Ganges River and how it is still occurring today.)

(She points to a cat in the rock.) Vishnu Sharma uses for his characters only birds, animals and reptiles. And every story has a moral behind it. And this time there was a very intelligent, learned, wicked, old, crafty cat. I am sure cat lovers will not like all these adjectives, but the truth is that he was that. He had read all the epics. He knew everything about everything, but he had become so very old he could no longer run after the rats. Many a day he starved and became very thin. But he was a learned cat, a wise one, so he thought let me make a penance like Arjuna. Sure enough the rats mistook him for a saint. (They) went up to serve him, but they never came back. There you see the cat with a faint innocence. Look at the rats-looking up to the cat- as if to say, "You are our lord and master. Save us."

Here you see the goddess Lakshmi sitting on a lotus flower. And her two hands suggesting (that she's) holding the lotus flower. On either side are her attendants. Then there are two elephants. One of them is bringing the water over her while the other has the water caught in his trunk. Can you see that? The artists have been very clever. There is no space for both of the trunks to go up. So, one is up and the other is not.

When we pray to God, we ask for the grace of the divine and speak of this grace as being showered. We don't say that grace falls down or drops down. We say the grace is showered. If you have seen an elephant take the water in its trunk, lift the trunk up and bring the water down – it's a shower. So, whenever the artist wanted to imply the divine grace being showered they show the elephants. And whenever you see the elephants along with the goddesses we add a small prefix before the goddess Laksmi. We call her - ____Lakshmi.

When you look at a figure of a god or a goddess look at the figure in totality. Look at the hands. He (Vishnu) holds the disc and the conch. Anyway, the purpose of this incarnation was to destroy demon of the underworld (that) had carried away the earth goddesses and had hidden (her deep in the earth.) And it is only the animal pig that digs into the ground so Vishnu manifests himself as a huge, wild pig and relinquishes the demon. As an animal, he had to behave like an animal. How does an animal identify his object? SMELL! That's why Vishnu smells the bosom of the goddess. Vishnu is

sometimes shown as resting on the coils of the cosmic serpent. Sometimes sitting on the coils like a canopy. Sometimes the same serpent offers himself as a foot stool....
...The deer in Hindu art represents the mind. Mind is abstract how can you show the mind. You can show the qualities of the mind through something that can be visualized for which the deer is chosen because the deer is always restless. So, when you see a god or a goddess holding the deer in the split fingers it means mind under control.

Now the last panel. It's another beautiful part of the story. It's the later part of the story. It's the fifth incarnation- that of a dwarf. Vamana. There was a demon king called Bali. Although he belonged to the clan of demons, he had many good qualities. The only bad quality that he had was his egoism. That he could give anything to anybody. Vishnu wanted him to lose that egoism so he would deserve his place.

And when the demon king was making a big sacrifice and giving away gifts to everyone who came to ask him for charity Vishnu took the form of a very small dwarf. The nature of the demon king was he never got up from his throne. He always sat on the throne and who ever came for charity should cringe, bend and beg. And the demon king always liked his hand to be like this. (Hold out hand)

But when this little dwarf Vamana approached the demon king-- walking down the court even without realizing what he was doing, the demon king jumped from his seat and ran down the steps and said, "What can I give you? Your face is radiant with mischief." The little dwarf smiled very knowingly and asked him, "Are you sure that you can give me what I want?" His pride was p-r-i-c-k-e-d. "Here I am with such a big kingdom! Ask whatever you want. See if I'll refuse it" The little one asked, "I want only three steps of land measured by my own small foot. The king r-o-a-r-e-d in laughter. He said, "I thought that you were a wise one. No, you're not- stupid child. You don't know how to ask. I will teach you to ask. I have so many elephants, thousands of horses- so much wealth. Ask whatever you want." The little one said, "I am happy with three steps. Nothing more than three steps, but nothing less than three steps." The demon thought it was futile to pursue it- to get the dwarf to ask for more. He readily accepted to give the gift. He said, "Measure out the three steps. Where ever you want in my vast kingdom."

When Vishnu as the dwarf- knew the demon granted his wish he started growing. He G-R-E-W, He G-R-E-W, He G-R-E-W and GREW, GREW, GREW to such heights. He filled the entire universe. The demon king could no longer lift up his head to look at him. With one foot he measured the earth, with the other foot he measured the heavens. (With) these two steps the entire universe was covered. But the promise was for three steps. Where was the place for the third? By then- the demon had realized who the dwarf was. He repented and asked this huge form of light to come back to the dwarf form so that he (could) feast his eyes upon him as he came down. And then he should lift up his little foot and put it on his head. That was for the third step.

But what happened when that little foot touched the head of the demon? Immediately he was liberated. The Divine touch liberated him. And there you find Vishnu with multiple arms measuring the earth and the heavens and demanding- Where is that one more step? He measured beyond the realms of the heavenly bodies. There you see the moon. There you see the sun.

Suggested Activities: Have students read some of the tales from *The Panchatantra* and rewrite the stories in a modern setting. Students can also draw the different hand gestures, mudras. One excellent source for studying mudras is *Hindu Gods and Goddesses* by A.G. Mitchell.

**TAPE 11**- STONE CARVING OF ARDHANARESKVARA*
Told by Sunithi L. Narayan

I would say this is the first representation on granite that shows the oneness of God as the divine father and the mother in one form-- which gets a special name Ardhanareskvara.

There you find the right hand of the figure is masculine and the left half is feminine. The right half is Shiva and the left half is Parvati. Look at the difference in the cheek. The left cheek is a little fuller. The left earring is more elaborate. The left curve in the neck just a wee bit deeper. Look at the sloping left shoulder and the graceful arms on the left side. Look at the broad, strong shoulders on the right- very masculine. Even the left part of the necklace is a little more ornate. Again on the right side- the one breast – the shape of the waist-- the hip, the pelvic girdle, down the legs, the ankles, the anklet, the feet. When you look at the left leg, it's just a wee bit shorter than the right. Yet, the figure doesn't look odd when you understand the concept of it. This is the earliest on granite.

There was a rishi who would not worship the feminine side at all. But Shiva said, "I am both masculine and feminine. I have both in me." This rishi would not accept it all. So, he took a form of a bee and thought that he would go around Shiva. When he went half way around, he saw that the form was half woman. Rishi thought that he could somehow spilt the masculine side and then go around it. But, every side that spilt turned into a feminine and masculine form. Soon- the rishi realized what a futile idea this was– God is both - mother and father.

*Students will also see a batik tapestry from India which is about 6 feet long. It beautifully shows Shiva in the half-woman and half-man form - the Ardhanari.

**Tape 12** – PHILOSOPHY OF GIVING/LAKSHMI
Told by Sunithi L. Narayan

Of all the charity that you do- that one does the best charity is to feed a hungry person. Because only that deed – does the given be satisfied. When he's full, he says "That's enough. I can't eat anymore." Although you say, "I give you a little more." He'll say, "No, that's enough." But this word enough doesn't come if you give him land or money or jewels. He may always feel that you could give him a little more. And so the best of charity is to feed a hungry man because we believe that the hungry stomach when it is fed would bless the given.

See -in my grandma's, -- my grandfather's home – my grandfather would say as a matter of fact everyday, "Go see whether there are any guests for lunch or dinner." So, we would automatically open the doors to others because we believe that God can come as a form of a guest and food is the only one that satisfies...and the family would be blessed. That's why when there's an annual ceremony for the ancestors, we believe in ancestor worship, we feed people who are Brahmins. We believe that the spirits of the ancestors at that time decide that these people come to eat. (?) After they have eaten we would ask them, "Has any mistake been committed unknowing by me?" They would say, "No, everything is all right. We are satisfied."

That's a tradition. And so by this-from childhood even though they may question the idea of this, the child grows up with this idea that feeding is important. You have to share your food. You must not waste your food. I have said this to my children and to my grandchildren. The goddess of plenty is Lakshmi. And it is that Goddess who gives us money to buy things to eat. So, if a child says, "Oh, NO, I don't want this food." I would say, "Lakshmi will go and sit by the pools and weep. You don't want Lakshmi to weep, do you?" So, never waste food. That's very important. My father used to always say, "Eat whatever is on your plate. Eat what is served on your plate." That teaches the child to respect food.

Food is something, which gives you energy. Energy is fire. Fire is one of the elements and can be Shiva's form. You see each of the figures is associated with the elements. We are all made of the elements. All the five elements of the universe are within us. The thumb represents fire. The little finger represents water. The ring finger is earth. The middle finger is space. The forefinger is the air. These five elements are aspect of the divine.

**Tape 13-** STORY OF THE BUDDHA
Shobita Punja

This comes from a place from Sarnath in the fifth century. It's a lovely sculpture. It would have been a part of the railing that goes around a stupa. The pilgrims would have looked at it and understood the story- the entire story of the Buddha. Here we have his mother. We are told that one night, his mother, Maya had a dream about a white elephant. The court astrologist says this means that she's going to either have a son who is going to be a very great king or be a very great sage- a teacher. She and her husband belong to the Kshatriyas families. You know the Brahmins were the teachers and the priests. The Kshatriyas are the ruling class – the ones who are allowed to rule other people. Being from such a class, the father was very keen that his son became a king rather than a teacher. So you see, he prevented his son. He made up his mind that he wouldn't allow his son to get out of the palace until he was old enough to do the right things.

We are told that the pregnant mother went to her mother's house because that's the tradition in India. You go to your mother's house to have your first baby. Do you have that in America- mothers come to visit you? ("Yes," the listeners say.) She took a rest in a little garden and she had her baby before she got to her mother's place. Of course, it wasn't naturally born. We are told that it came out from her side. It's very interesting that very divine people don't get born naturally. It's an interesting concept actually because it's a way of preserving that sanctity for them- a lot of religions have that. So, she was in this lovely drove of trees as we are told. Then she goes to her mother's house. And then she returns to her palace.

The boy grows up in the palace - never allowed to go outside. Then we are told that terrible story of one day when he goes out of the palace in a procession. He goes outside and sees for the first time in his life – a corpse, a sick man, an old man and a sage. And he says, "Good lord. What is this? What is this suffering? What is this life that ends in death? What is the purpose in living?" I always found this part quite shocking. I see beggars and corpse every day and I don't become the Buddha. I think the shock was never having seen it before. That compassion does suddenly come and you think- gosh why do people live in such a miserable fashion?

So, we are told that he was very uncomfortable after that. He came back to the palace, but couldn't stay in the palace at all. He removed everything- all his jewelry and everything. He took his faithful horse and went outside – racing – leaving his little son and his wife in the palace. He shaves off his hair as you can see here. He goes to this very famous place called _____. It's here that he sits and meditates for 40 nights and 40 days- very interesting number. Then he is said to have obtained nirvana- very happy.-- He's very content that this wisdom has now come to him, but his disciplines are very upset with him. They say, "No, no. Now, the point is that you must teach us what you have learned. So he says, "No, you have to find your own nirvana and enlightenment. No one can teach anybody else what to do." They bully him and bully him and take him to a place just outside of Varanasi.

Are you going to Banaras? (Listeners respond.) Sarnath is one of the most beautiful places on the earth. It's just peaceful, gentle and quiet. It was a garden and we call it the Deer Park. Whenever you show Sarnath, you always find these two deer. And he gave his first sermon there. This is how we depict it symbolically. This is the wheel of dharma, which was turned. Dharma is a very strange and peculiar word that is used in Sanskrit. It can mean anything from duty to law to responsibility. In poetry it's described quite beautifully.

Dharma means - in really nice symbolism-- like a fish when it's out of water so will you feel if you have not found your dharma. But once you have found it, then you are like a fish in water. Now, it means your path –it means your spiritual path. You know some people get married – not happy-- try a job-not happy--find another job-not happy—play bridge—not happy- go shopping- not happy. You know they haven't found their dharma. Once you've found that mission, that passion, that thing that you really-yes--love doing. It leads you to some kind of understanding of life yes… on that path you'll be as comfortable as a fish in water.

This symbol (is) used on the Indian flag. The Indian flag has a green band that suggests fertility and the green earth. We have a white ban on top, which is purity. The orange band on top is the color religious people wear. (robes or turbans) It's the color of sacrifice or giving. This chakra is in the middle. It has 24 spokes and it's the wheel. It's called the wheel of dharma. It means the wheel towards not progress in a material sense, but spiritual progress-- a finding to the answer of life. So, this was fifth-century AD. It was a Buddhist symbol from the third-century BC. Today we still use it in our contemporary world as a symbol of the same ideas. As they walked around the stupa, pilgrims would understand all the stories of the Buddha in a visual form.

We have no idea of what Buddha looked like. All we know was that he was young and that he was a prince who gave up everything. We are trying to tell you what his state of mind is. Now, we are trying to tell you what his philosophy is. He's not a real face, but he's a symbol of an idea. You'll see this in Indian art all the time. They are not trying to portray (someone) naturally but they are trying to portray an idea. Everything is a symbol in this.

His face is in perfect balance. No emotion is shown because one of the basic principles of Buddhism is that equilibrium. It stems from a very beautiful idea. Void-nothingness- imagine an ocean--everything that you see on this earth -that you can smell --that you can touch- that you can feel has come from that one source. Ok, that source is divine. It has no form. It is nothing. It's empty. Everything has manifested from that one source. So, if you see a butterfly or a cockroach, you're supposed to be able to say it's divine. Yes--She and I (points to a listener) come from the same source. We are just different pictures of that same divinity. That's enlightenment. That's the one truth- if you can get that. I couldn't hit her (points to a listener) because she is me.

The whole concept of non-violence of Buddha comes from that.--It's not vegetarianism the way we do it now today. Just eat enough to keep myself going and try not to hurt anything else because that too is divine. Mahatma Gandhi in the 20th century used the same concept of non-violence protest. Gandhi kept telling people but nobody seemed to understand. This is a very philosophical argument. You have to be quite

enlightened to do it. Every time the British judge would put him into jail because he was striking somewhere. You know how in the jail they teach you how to make slippers or (someone calls out license plates). Gandhi would come out of jail and give the sandals that he made to his English jailer. I mean that's what he was about. I have nothing against the British. I have nothing against a person. It's the system that I am fighting. Non-violence rebellion against the British was one of the-- I mean they just stood in front of an army with guns- with police with sticks. I mean he just STOOD. He commanded everyone just to stand and not move. He said, "You can't even lift a h-a-n-d." You can't even protect yourself. They would just stay on the floor and not even move. And the British were so infuriated with this method. It's much easier to deal with violence against violence. This kind of thing with women and children just sitting in the roads – refusing to get up...

The idea comes from this very philosophical Buddhist idea of non-violence. The second thing he (Buddha) taught was the concept of desire. He goes into the street and sees these people. He comes back with this concept that everything in life is suffering. And this suffering is caused by our desire. He says if you can eliminate all your desires. You'll be happy. And he says- actually it's very nicely put in the text. Look you have no choice whether you wanted to be born a man or a woman or an Indian or an American or rich or poor. You have no choice. I had no choice what color my eyes would be. Right? The only thing that I do have a choice about is whether I am happy or not. Do you see the point? I can be desperately unhappy because my nose is too flat or my color is wrong or I would have loved to be six inches taller. I can make myself miserable my whole life by wanting. I would be much happier if I had a bigger house- - a nicer husband –better behaved children—yes-but NO-I can be happy as I am.

The logic to that is because I am divine. If I can say that- if I can say, I am not a part of God- not a child of God, but I AM.-- I can't say today (She laughs) -but I am. Ok—If I can say that then I am perfect the way I am. There is nothing wrong with me. If I wear bigger earrings, it's not going to make a better lecture. If I was prettier, it would not have gotten me more friends. I am perfect the way I am. This too is perfection even if I don't have an arm or (if I am) desperately dyslexic or whatever- you know? I am still perfect. To be able to say that and say I don't need anything. Because one desire-- leads to a whole cycle of desires. If I have a son- he must go to the best school-he must get good grades- he must get into the best university—he must marry well—he must get the best job. One desire just snowballs. It just gets larger and larger. It can take over your life.

Related Activites:

There are many concepts which need further exploration such as dharma, nirvana, and the castes system. Also, students may enjoy learning about the national symbols of India. The National Emblem of India is the Sarnath Lion-Capital of Ashoka, which can be easily viewed on India's currency. Other national symbols are the peacock, tiger, and the lotus flower.

**Tape 14** – GANDHI/INDIAN PHILOSOPHY
Told by Shobita Punja

Gandhi did it. We have people doing this all the time. About five years ago, there was a story in the newspaper. Do you remember this story? He was a diamond merchant, a son of a very famous diamond merchant. He was very wealthy. One morning he gets up - opens his safe. Takes all his money and his diamonds and walks through the streets of his city. He just flings it away. He gives it away. He puts on a white robe. Now, he is one of India's most famous environmentalists. Ah, but it was the gesture. And Gandhi did the same thing. Ah, when he came back from England in pants with a suit, a tie and everything else with his wonderful education-- He comes back to India. There is this vast multitude of people whose language he doesn't even know. He only knows two languages. He doesn't know all the languages of India. He joins in the National Movement. He wears just a loincloth. He drops the suit and tie. Yes. He wears wooden slippers and carries a stick. Now, everybody in India knows what that means. It means here's a person who understands that this is not important. (She tugs at her sari.) But what you are is more important than what you wear.

And, he would go by train- right across the country -calling people to support the National Movement. And nobody understood what he said, but everybody understood what he was. They called him the Father of the Nation. They-- they would lay down their lives for him. Just because he was strong enough to do that. It takes a lot of courage and a lot of wisdom to be able to do that- to reach that point of understanding. That it's you. The strength comes from inside. That's the half-closed eyes in this (artwork – Buddha). The meditative eyes. The strength comes from within. It can't come from outside...

...Hindu mythology - Indian philosophy says very carefully and very seriously- we have myths but don't believe them. A-a-h, because the Gods are not people. Life is described as one continuous cycle. Ok? The cycle goes from life to death. Everything that is created will die. Everything that is created will live for a short span of time and then dies. So, there is a lifecycle of a butterfly, there is a lifecycle of us and there is a lifecycle of a dinosaur. So, it's different lifecycles, but everything that is created will be born and then will die. This is one continuous cycle. There are not three different parts. They are single, but because many people can not understand such abstract ideas we say that there are Brahma, who is the creator, Vishnu who is the preserver, and Shiva who is the lord of destruction and death.

Now, in the beginning, there was nothing -just an ocean of nothingness. From this everything that is created comes out. Ok? Now, everything that is created comes out of that and in the end will go back to it. The going back is very important because Shiva is not so much the god of destruction, but of returning. All right--You should never pray to Shiva for – um- you shouldn't pray to Shiva for new cars, and houses or anything that will preserve you in this life. You pray to Vishnu for preservation of life. You pray to Shiva when you say, "Take me back. I don't want to be in this cycle of life anymore."

I was asked the difference between moksha and nirvana. In this case it would be like this. In Hindu philosophy we have no good guys and bad guys. There is no concept of sin. There is no concept of guilt. It's a great joy. (laughter) We only have wise guys and stupid guys. The purpose of life is to understand that one truth-- that you and I are the same. Once you get that then this cycle will be broken. And you get moksha. So, nirvana is the attainment of enlightenment. Moksha is the breaking of the cycle. The whole point is that you can get as many lives as you need to get out of being stupid and become one. You can take eons to understand that God is in everything. Everything is divine. For the Buddhists in one the branches it says, "That everyone will become the Buddha one day, but you can take as long as you want." If you really want to break the cycle it can be done in a moment. It doesn't require a lot of reading or writing or thinking. It can be done with just a revelation – like I believe it. Then the whole cycle is over.

Related Activities:
Students can research some of the ways Gandhi led the freedom movement in India.

**Tape 15**- JAINISM/BUDDHISM
Told by the Khajuraho Guide

Jainism is an off-shoot of Hinduism, but they don't believe in Hindu Gods. They don't have any concept of god. I think that Mahavira was the first man who walked on this earth with the strong faith that there is no god. He announced, "Don't fool yourself with the concept of God." What is eternal? That is nature. And you are part of nature. So, you are part of nature. You have come from nature. And you will go back to nature. And the moment your knowledge, your intellect and your wisdom allow you to possess things (you have the) cycle of birth...

Until the sixth-century BC religion was a very personal and individual thing. Religion was a part of self-realization and spiritual enlightenment. Religion was self-understanding and a way of life. Sixth-century BC was the time when religion was made into an institution. Then what happens...from the religion the realization part was developed up and what was left- rituals, sacrifices, alter worship fear of God.

So these two young princes of the time-- Mahavira and Buddha-- after having the experience of their life and having all kinds of royal things—But within them-- they were searching for peace- a peace of mind and a peace of soul. So, they left their kingdoms (for) self-enlightenment. (For) 20 years (they) wandered as a sadhus-- meeting so many people and discussing and meditating everyday. That's how they got their self-enlightenment. So, Mahavira and Buddha- they were contemporary to each other.

They were from sixth-century BC and they came as great reformers of Hinduism. So, they rejected the religion part and accepted the philosophy part. They gave much more by developing the philosophy through their beautiful understanding and teachings. Buddha asked people not to accept him as a God--- ever. Buddha also asked people not to make any expression of him. Through his disciples, Buddha requested people not to make any idols or sculptures of him. But people have done just this.

Mahavira asked people to liberate themselves from all types of possessions- to make yourself free from all types of worldly things. He requested people not to make any altars. But today all Jain temples are full of altars. He asked people to liberate themselves from all types of material things, --to make themselves free of all types of possessions. But today all Jain temples are glittering with silver, gold, precious stones and diamonds. Who follows the religion in mass? The mass is busy in their livelihood - working from sunrise to sunset. No time to go deep into philosophy, but this is a very natural instinct in every human being. He can never feel contented or satisfied without some material belongings. So, Buddha and Mahavira are the founders of these two new religions on the subcontinent, but they are an off-shoot of Hinduism. We are very grateful for them because they reformed Hinduism. They stopped unwanted things like rituals and sacrifices.

Look at these two figures of Buddha and Mahavira. One is sitting in lotus position (and) one is standing. These two are typical expressions for Buddha and

Mahavira. Now--look at the expression. It's very difficult unless you can see the bottom to distinguish between Buddha and Mahavira. Because curly hairs, broad forehead, long ears, and lotus position are common features for any enlightened person who has attained moksha and nirvana.

Even Hindu Gods are depicted in the lotus position. You often see a person who is sitting in mediation for self- enlightenment in the lotus position with mountains in the background. All three of these gestures are performing a triangle. A triangle means total transformation of your individual consciousness to the cosmic consciousness to obtain the ultimate peace in life. So, in geometrical expression an ascending triangle is a symbol of cosmic consciousness. An inverted triangle is a symbol of eternal cosmic energy. Infusion of energy and cosmic consciousness – when you combine these two triangles there is a star...

Incarnation is an avatar of the divine. - A reincarnation is a rebirth. We human beings are coming on this earth again and again, but an avatar comes once. It comes for a certain purpose. And then the purpose is fulfilled. But our purpose of life is to obtain moksha. We will keep coming again and again on this earth until we obtain moksha. Moksha means total liberation from all kinds of possessions-a liberation from all kinds of bindings. In this body there is a binding of five cosmic elements: earth, water, fire, air and space. So, when the soul separates from this body, when you die, we put the body into a fire. We do this in place of deterioration.

Suggested Activities:

Throughout the oral tapes I offered minimal suggestions. But there are many ways to extend these lessons. Some include reading stories (see student bibliography) about the myths. While others may include drawing illustrations, journal entries, classroom discussions, research projects and retelling the myths as songs.

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